COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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Warning

It was his worst-received novel since *Grimus*. One or two critics liked the book and wrote about it with sympathy and understanding. Many other reviewers treated it as thinly disguised autobiography and above more than one review there appeared a picture of himself and his 'hot new girlfriend'. This was painful, yes, but in the end it released him into another kind of freedom. He had always cared, sometimes too much, about being well reviewed. Now he saw that this, too, was another version of the trap of wanting to be loved into which he had catastrophically fallen several years before. Whatever was being said about his new book, he remained proud of it, he knew why it was the way it was and still felt that there were good artistic reasons for his choices. So all of a sudden he became capable of shrugging off the obloquy. Like all writers, he wanted his work to be appreciated, that was still true. Like all writers, he was going on an intellectual, linguistic, formal and emotional journey; the books were messages from that journey, and he hoped readers would enjoy travelling with him. But, he now saw, if at some point they were unable to go down the road he'd taken, that was too bad, it was still the road he was going to take. *If you can't come with me, I'm sorry*, he silently said to his critics, *but I'm still going this way.*

In Telluride, Colorado, he had to be careful how fast he walked, how quickly he climbed stairs, how much alcohol he drank. The air was thin, and he was an asthmatic. But this was a mountain paradise. Maybe the air was thin in the other Eden, too, he thought, but he was sure there weren't as many good films being screened in that snake-and-apple man trap situated somewhere to the west of the land of Nod.

Tom Luddy and Bill Pence, the curators of the Telluride Film Festival, each year invited a third guest curator to join them, and in 2001 it was his turn. He had selected a short roster of 'personal' films to show, including Satyajit Ray's *The Golden Fortress*, about a boy who dreamed of an earlier life in a golden fortress filled with jewels; Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, about a planet that was a single mind so powerful that it could bring men's deepest desires to life; and Fritz Lang's silent-era masterwork *Metropolis*, a dark poem about tyranny and freedom, man

and machine, restored and rescued at last from Giorgio Moroder's electronica soundtrack.

It was Labor Day weekend, his last free time before *Fury*'s American publication. He met Padma in Los Angeles and they flew to Colorado, to spend her thirty-first birthday, which fell on 1 September, watching films in the mountains and walking the informal streets of the town where Butch and Sundance had robbed their first bank, having a coffee with Werner Herzog here, a chat with Faye Dunaway there. At Telluride nobody was hustling or selling and everyone was approachable. The movie polymaths Leonard Maltin and Roger Ebert, the documentary film-maker Ken Burns and other well-informed movie folk were on hand, imparting wisdom and cracking wise. The agreed position of everyone at Telluride was that Tom Luddy knew everyone on earth. The great Luddy, Lord of Misrule and master of ceremonies, took it all in good part. Telluride was a jokey place. To take the ski lift up the mountain to the Chuck Jones theatre you had to make a Wabbit Weservation.

They saw the hit French film *Amélie* with its slightly-too-sweet elements of fantasy and the Croatian *No Man's Land* directed by Danis Tanovic, which was like *Waiting for Godot* in a trench under fire, and Agnieszka Holland's workmanlike, HBO-financed *Shot in the Heart*, an adaptation of Mikal Gilmore's book about his murderer brother Gary. They saw three movies a day, fell asleep in some of them, and in between and after the screenings there were parties. They came down from the mountain on 3 September and eight days later it would be impossible not to remember that Edenic moment as a paradise from which not just they but the whole world had been expelled.

The official US publication date of *Fury* was 11 September 2001. On that date a novel intended as an ultra-contemporary, satirical portrait of New York was transformed by events into a historical novel about a city that was no longer the one he had written about, whose golden age had ended in the most abruptly appalling way; a novel which, when read by those who remembered the city as it had been, inspired an emotion that was not part of its author's plan: nostalgia. In Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* comic strip one of the characters said, sadly, 'You know, I really miss September 10th.' That was what had

happened to his novel, he understood. The events of 11 September had turned it into a portrait of the day before. The golden fortress full of jewels was now only a dream of an earlier, lost life.

On 10 September 2001, he was not in New York but in Houston, Texas. He had read at Barnes & Noble in Union Square on the fifth, then flown to Boston for his book tour and was there on the sixth and seventh. On the morning of 8 September he flew out of Logan Airport just three days before the fatal planes, and was in Chicago for two days. Then on the night of the tenth there was a full house at the Alley Theatre, Houston – nine hundred people in the theatre, two hundred turned away, he was told by Rich Levy of the reading series Inprint, his hosts for the night – and a surprise outside: a small Islamic demonstration against his presence, perhaps two hundred strong. That felt like a visitation from the past. The next morning he remembered the bearded placard carriers and wondered if they regretted identifying themselves as extremists on, of all the days they could have chosen to reveal their bigotry, that particular day.

He had only just woken up when a radio journalist called his hotel room. He had agreed to talk to the station before catching his flight to Minneapolis, but it was still too early for that. 'I'm sorry,' said the voice in his ear, 'but we're going to have to cancel. Because of what's happened in New York we're dumping into the coverage of that.' He had never acquired the American habit of turning on the TV first thing in the morning. 'What's happening in New York?' he asked. There was a pause and then the voice said, 'Turn on your TV now.' He reached for the remote, and less than a minute later he saw the second plane.

He couldn't sit down. It didn't seem right to sit. He stood in front of the TV with the remote in his hand and the number *fifty thousand* kept repeating in his brain. Fifty thousand people worked in the Twin Towers. He couldn't imagine the numbers of the dead. He thought about his first night in New York City, his visit to the Windows on the World. He remembered Paul Auster telling him about Philippe Petit's high-wire walk between the two towers. But mostly he just stood there and watched the buildings burn and then in agonised disbelief cried out, at the same time as thousands of others

round the world, 'It's not there! It's not there any more!' as the South Tower fell.

Birds were screaming in the sky.

He didn't know what to do so he set out for the airport but when they were halfway there the radio told them to turn back because of the nationwide ground stop. Back at the Four Seasons he didn't have a room any more and the lobby was crowded with other people in the same situation. He found an armchair in a corner and started making calls. Rich Levy of Inprint came to the rescue. He spoke to the poet Ed Hirsch and his wife Janet, who were stranded in DC, and they offered him their house near the Menil Collection in the Museum District if he agreed to feed their dog. It was comforting that day to be in a writer's house, alone among books, in the world of the mind while mindlessness ruled the world.

Nobody he knew was dead but thousands were. Peter Carey's wife, Alison Summers, had been at the ATM at the foot of the North Tower when the first plane hit but she had lived. Caryl Phillips on Hudson Street saw it happen and so did Robert Hughes on Prince. Young Sophie Auster, on her first day at high school and alone on a subway train for the first time in her life, passed under the Twin Towers as the atrocity was happening above. September 12 was a second day of horror and sadness. *Look at our beautiful broken city,* he thought, weeping, and realised how deeply he was attached to it already. He walked down the street from the Hirsches' home to the Rothko Chapel. Even for a godless man it felt like a good place to be. There were others there; not many people, just a grave few. Nobody spoke to anyone else. There was nothing to say. Everyone was alone with his or her sorrow.

Obviously his book tour was cancelled. Nobody was interested in books. The only books that sold in the following weeks were the Bible, the Quran and books about al-Qaeda and the Taliban. A psychologist on the TV was saying that New Yorkers who had been away from their families on 9/11 should go and show themselves to their loved ones to prove they were OK. It wasn't enough to phone them. They would need the evidence of their own eyes. *Yes,* he thought, *I should go to*

London. But it wasn't possible yet. The flight ban was lifted and airports had begun to reopen. Houston reopened, and then LAX, but the New York airports remained closed and international travel, too, was at a standstill. He would have to wait a few more days.

He called Padma in Los Angeles to say he was coming to see her. She said she was doing a lingerie shoot.

Ten days after the attacks, on his last night in LA before he flew to London, he had dinner at the home of Eric and Tania Idle with Steve Martin, Garry Shandling and others. At least three of the funniest men in America were round the table but comedy was hard to find. Finally Garry Shandling said, his voice and body full of bloodhound lugubriousness, 'Such an awful thing. Seems like everyone lost someone, or knows someone who lost someone . . . Actually, I knew several of the terrorists . . .' It was the blackest of black comedy, the first 9/11 joke, and laughter released some of the grief everyone was feeling, but he somehow doubted that Shandling would be using the gag in his routine any time soon.

Robert Hughes, *Time* magazine's art critic, told him on the phone that after he saw the planes flying over Soho he had walked around in shock. On his way home he had stopped by a bakery and found the shelves cleaned out. Not a loaf remained, not a bagel, and the old baker standing amid the emptiness spread his arms and said, 'Should happen every day.'

In London, his marital problems seemed trivial now. Elizabeth briefly relented and allowed Milan to stay at Pembridge Mews. He picked his son up from school, fed him, washed his hair, put him to bed, and stood over him for an hour and watched him sleep. Milan had hugged him long and hard when he returned, and Zafar, too, had been more physically demonstrative than was his wont. The psychologist had been right. Even though they had both known, with the 'knowing' part of their brains, that he hadn't even been in New York City, so he was obviously safe, they had needed the evidence of their own eyes.

In *Le Nouvel Observateur* in France and the *Guardian* in London his novel was being called prescient, even prophetic. He wasn't a prophet, he told one journalist. He had had some trouble with prophets in his time and he wasn't interested in applying for the job. But he wondered why the book had felt so urgent, why it insisted on being written *at once*, and where did they come from, those Furies hovering over New York and within his character's heart?

He was being asked to write something – the news agenda had certainly come round to him now – but he didn't do so for two weeks after the attacks. Many of the first think pieces felt redundant to him. Everyone had seen the horror and didn't need to be told how to feel about it. Then slowly his thoughts coalesced. 'The fundamentalist seeks to bring down a great deal more than buildings,' he wrote. 'Such people are against, to offer just a brief list, freedom of speech, a multi-party political system, universal adult suffrage, accountable government, Jews, homosexuals, women's rights, pluralism, secularism, short skirts, dancing, beardlessness, evolution theory, sex . . . The fundamentalist believes that we believe in nothing. In his world view, he has his absolute certainties, while we are sunk in sybaritic indulgences. To prove him wrong, we must first know that he is wrong. We must agree on what matters: kissing in public places, bacon sandwiches, disagreement, cutting-edge fashion, literature, generosity, water, a more equitable distribution of the world's resources, films, music, freedom of thought, beauty, love. These will be our weapons. Not by making war, but by the unafraid way we choose to live shall we defeat them. How to defeat terrorism? Don't be terrorised. Don't let fear rule your life. Even if you are scared.'

(While he was writing this, a story about his being banned from American carriers by the US Federal Aviation Administration broke in the press. British Airways and the Europeans remained calm but in America the general panic created a travel problem for him all over again. 'I see,' he thought, not without some bitterness, 'first you let all the terrorists on to the planes, and now you want to ground the anti-terrorist novelists, and that's your plan for keeping America safe.' When things calmed down the FAA calmed down too and lifted their restrictions; his problems immediately eased,

though two American carriers refused to carry him for a further ten years.)

He went to France for the publication of *Furie*, which in the new world that had just come into being was received far better than it had been in the English language, in the old world that had ceased to exist. When he got back to London he went for dinner at a friend's flat and another guest, a Mr Proudie, launched into the already common 'America asked for this/America deserved it' argument. He objected strongly, saying it was no time for this kind of British anti-Americanism, which disrespected and criminalised the innocent dead. Mr Proudie responded, with extreme aggression, 'We protected you, didn't we?' As if that proved his point. In the argument that followed they almost came to blows.

He wrote a second article, which concluded, 'If terrorism is to be defeated, the world of Islam must take on board the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern is based, and without which their countries' freedom will remain a distant dream.' At the time this was thought by many to be a pipe dream at best, and, at worst, a liberal's foolish refusal to accept the resilience of the Islamic world view. A decade later the young people of the Arab world, in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and elsewhere, tried to transform their societies according to exactly these principles. They wanted jobs and liberty, not religion. It was not clear that they would get what they wanted, but they left the world in no doubt that they wanted it.

It was a beautiful autumn in New York but the city was not itself. He walked the streets and saw the same spooked look in every eye. Loud noises were harbingers of revenant doom. Every conversation was an act of mourning, every gathering felt like a wake. Then slowly the spirit returned. There was a day when the Brooklyn Bridge was closed because of a reported threat against it, and instead of being scared, people were angry about the disruption to their journeys. That was the *I'm-walking-here* New York he loved. It was getting its groove back. The restrictions on travel below 14th Street were still there, but they were lessening. The Statue of Liberty was still closed to visitors, but it

would reopen. The dreadful hole in the ground and the equally melancholy hole in the sky above were still there, and fires still burned below ground, but even that agony could be borne. Life would vanquish death. It would not be the same as before, but it would be all right. He spent Thanksgiving that year at the home of Paul, Siri and Sophie Auster, and Peter Carey and Alison Summers were there too, and they gave thanks for the survival of Sophie and Alison, and for what was good in the world, that needed, more than ever, to be cherished.

The story of his little battle, too, was coming to an end. The prologue was past and now the world was grappling with the main event. It would have been easy, after everything that had happened to him, and after the enormity of the crime against this city, to succumb to hatred of the religion in whose name these things were done and of its adherents too. Anyone who looked even vaguely Arab experienced some of that backlash in those weeks and months of aftermath. Young men wore T-shirts reading DON'T BLAME ME, I'M HINDU. Drivers of yellow cabs, many of whom had Muslim names, decked out their taxis with flags and patriotic decals to ward off their passengers' rage. But in this matter of wrath, too, the city, on the whole, showed restraint. The many were not held guilty of the crimes of the few. And he too refused anger. Rage made you the creature of those who enraged you, it gave them too much power. Rage killed the mind, and now more than ever the mind needed to live, to find a way of rising above the mindlessness.

He chose to believe in human nature, and in the universality of its rights and ethics and freedoms, and to stand against the fallacies of relativism that were at the heart of the invective of the armies of the religious (*we hate you because we aren't like you*) and of their fellow travellers in the West, too, many of whom, disappointingly, were on the left. If the art of the novel revealed anything, it was that human nature was the great constant, in any culture, in any place, in any time, and that, as Heraclitus had said two thousand years earlier, a man's *ethos*, his way of being in the world, was his *daimon*, the guiding principle that shaped his life – or, in the pithier, more familiar formulation of the idea, that character was destiny. It was hard to hold on to that idea while the

smoke of death stood in the sky over Ground Zero and the murders of thousands of men and women whose characters had not determined their fates were on everyone's mind, it hadn't mattered if they were hard workers or generous friends or loving parents or great romantics, the planes hadn't cared about their *ethos*; and yes, now terrorism could be destiny, war could be destiny, our lives were no longer wholly ours to control; but still our sovereign natures needed to be insisted on; perhaps more than ever amid the horror, it was important to speak up for individual human responsibility, to say that the murderers were morally responsible for their crimes, and neither their faith nor their rage at America was any excuse; it was important, at a time of gargantuan, inflated ideologies, not to forget the human scale, to continue to insist on our essential humanity, to go on making love, so to speak, in a combat zone.

In the pages of a novel it was clear that the human self was heterogeneous not homogeneous, not one thing but many, multiple, fractured and contradictory. The person you were for your parents was not the person you were with your children, your working self was other than your self as a lover, and depending on the time of day and your mood you might think of yourself as tall or skinny or unwell or a sports fan or conservative or fearful or hot. All writers and readers knew that human beings had broad identities, not narrow ones, and it was the breadth of human nature that allowed readers to find common ground and points of identification with Madame Bovary, Leopold Bloom, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Raskolnikov, Gandalf the Grey, Oskar Matzerath, the Makioka Sisters, the Continental Op, the Earl of Emsworth, Miss Marple, the Baron in the Trees, and Salo the mechanical messenger from the planet Tralfamadore in Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan*. Readers and writers could take that knowledge of broad-based identity out into the world beyond the pages of books, and use the knowledge to find common ground with their fellow human beings. You could support different football teams but vote the same way. You could vote for different parties but agree about the best way to bring up your children. You could disagree about child rearing but share a fear of the dark. You could be afraid of different things but love the same music. You could detest each other's musical taste but

worship the same God. You could differ strongly on the question of religion but support the same football team.

This was what literature knew, had always known. Literature tried to *open the universe*, to increase, even if only slightly, the sum total of what it was possible for human beings to perceive, understand, and so, finally, to be. Great literature went to the edges of the known and pushed against the boundaries of language, form and possibility, to make the world feel larger, wider, than before. Yet this was an age in which men and women were being pushed towards ever narrower definitions of themselves, encouraged to call themselves just one thing, Serb or Croat or Israeli or Palestinian or Hindu or Muslim or Christian or Baha'i or Jew, and the narrower their identities became, the greater was the likelihood of conflict between them. Literature's view of human nature encouraged understanding, sympathy and identification with people not like oneself, but the world was pushing everyone in the opposite direction, towards narrowness, bigotry, tribalism, cultism and war. There were plenty of people who didn't want the universe opened, who would, in fact, prefer it to be shut down quite a bit, and so when artists went to the frontier and pushed they often found powerful forces pushing back. And yet they did what they had to do, even at the price of their own ease, and, sometimes, of their lives.

The poet Ovid was exiled by Caesar Augustus to a little hellhole on the Black Sea called Tomis. He spent the rest of his days begging to be allowed to return to Rome, but permission was never granted. So Ovid's life was blighted; but the poetry of Ovid outlasted the Roman Empire. The poet Mandelstam died in one of Stalin's labour camps, but the poetry of Mandelstam outlived the Soviet Union. The poet Lorca was killed by the Falangist thugs of Spain's Generalissimo Franco, but the poetry of Lorca outlived Franco's tyrannical regime. Art was strong, artists less so. Art could, perhaps, take care of itself. Artists needed defenders. He had been defended by his fellow artists when he needed it. He would try to do the same for others in need from now on, others who pushed boundaries, transgressed and, yes, blasphemed; all those artists who did not allow men of power or the cloth to draw lines in the sand and order them not to cross.

He delivered the Tanner Lectures at Yale. They were titled 'Step Across This Line'.

As to the battle over *The Satanic Verses*, it was still hard to say if it was ending in victory or defeat. The book had not been suppressed, and nor had its author, but the dead remained dead, and a climate of fear had grown up that made it harder for books like his to be published, or even, perhaps, to be written. Other religions quickly followed Islam's lead. In India, Hindu extremists attacked films and movie stars (the superstar Shah Rukh Khan was the target of violent protests merely for saying that Pakistani cricketers should have been included in a tournament in India) and works of scholarship (such as James Laine's biography of the Maratha warrior-king Shivaji, which so 'offended' that monarch's contemporary admirers that they attacked the research library in Pune where Laine had done some of his research and destroyed many irreplaceable ancient documents and objects). In Britain, Sikhs attacked the Sikh author of *Behzti* (Dishonour), a play they disapproved of. And the Islamic violence continued. In Denmark, a Somali man with an axe and a knife, linked to the radical al-Shabab militia broke into the home of the cartoonist Kurt Westergaard in Aarhus, after the publication of the so-called 'Danish cartoons' that had aroused the ire of Islamic extremists. In America, Yale University Press, publishers of a book discussing the case of the Danish cartoons would be too cowardly to include the cartoons in that book. In Britain, the home of the publisher of a book about the Prophet Muhammad's youngest wife was letter-bombed. A much longer struggle would be necessary before the age of menaces and fears could be said to have come to an end.

As 2001 drew to a close the Royal Shakespeare Company's stage adaptation of *Midnight's Children* was on its way to America, to be staged in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and then at the Apollo Theater in Harlem; one night during the New York run he would be interviewed onstage after the performance and so achieve something beyond his craziest dreams – to play the Apollo. At the same time he was working on *Shalimar the Clown*. This in the end was who he was, a teller of tales, a

creator of shapes, a maker of things that were not. It would be wise to withdraw from the world of commentary and polemic and re-dedicate himself to what he loved most, the art that had claimed his heart, mind and spirit ever since he was a young man, and to live again in the universe of once upon a time, of *kan ma kan*, it was so and it was not so, and to make the journey to the truth upon the waters of make-believe.

From his Dickensian, let's-tie-up-the-loose-strings seat in the future he saw the flowering of his niece Mishka's musical talent; his niece Maya contentedly moving into a life teaching little children; and the marriage of his niece Meena, his estranged sister Bunno's daughter. He saw Zafar doing good work and being happy, and Milan growing into another fine young man. And Elizabeth and he on good terms again. Bill Buford divorced, remarried more happily and became the successful author of books about food. Nigella Lawson became a gigantically successful author of books about food and married the art collector Charles Saatchi. Frances D'Souza became a baroness and then, in 2011, the Speaker of the House of Lords. William Nygaard retired and his son Mads took over his job at Aschehoug. Marianne Wiggins taught literature at the University of Southern California. James Fenton and Darryl Pinckney left Long Leys Farm and moved to New York. Pauline Melville was assaulted by a murderous intruder at her home in Highbury Hill but managed to wriggle free and escape through a window. The intruder was caught and jailed. Human life continued. Things worked out as well as things ever did, and far better than he had been able to hope on that dark Valentine's Day in 1989.

Not everything ended well. In August 2005 Robin Cook had a heart attack on a mountain in the Scottish Highlands and died.

And what of his Illusion, his Phantom of Liberty? On 24 March 2002, he took Padma to the *Vanity Fair* dinner and party in Hollywood on the day of the Academy Awards. They arrived at Morton's and as he watched her pose and pirouette for the human wall of screaming photographers, burning with the bright flame of her youth and beauty, he looked at the expression on her face and suddenly thought, *She's*

having sex, sex with hundreds of men at the same time, and they don't even get to touch her, there's no way any actual man can compete with that. And in the end he lost her, yes, but it was better to lose one's illusions and live in the knowledge that the world was real, and that no woman could make it what he wanted it to be. That was up to him.

Two days after the Oscars he flew back to London and was met off the plane by Nick Cottage, a genial Special Branch officer with an old-fashioned moustache, who told him that one of the higher-up officers, Bob Sait, himself the owner of a fine Lord Kitchener-like growth on his upper lip, wanted to come and see him the next morning. 'If I were you,' Nick added mysteriously, 'I'd make your own arrangements for later in the day.' He refused to explain what he meant but smiled an enigmatic secret policeman's smile.

He was driven to the Halcyon Hotel in Holland Park, an elegant pink edifice, where he had booked a suite. Jason Donovan had taken his Pembridge Mews house back at the end of the year's lease. Before he flew to LA for the Academy Awards he had found another Notting Hill house to rent, in Colville Mews, over the road from the young designer Alice Temperley's rapidly burgeoning fashion house. The new place was available in a couple of weeks, so he had put his stuff in storage and booked the Halcyon to cover the gap, initially for just two nights. Milan's Easter holidays were beginning the next day, and he had planned a week in France with both the boys. They would drive down to friends in Courtoin in Burgundy, and then visit Paris and Euro Disney on the way back.

At ten sharp on the morning of Wednesday 27 March 2002, Bob Sait and Nick Cottage met him at the Halcyon Hotel. 'Well, Joe,' said Sait, and then corrected himself, 'Excuse me – Salman, as you know, we've been maintaining this protection on advice from the intelligence services, until such time as they felt it was right to lower their assessment of the threat against yourself.'

'It's been a little strange, Bob,' he said, 'because in America I've been acting like an ordinary citizen for years, but when I've come back here you've insisted on going on –'

'I hope you'll be pleased, then,' Bob Sait said, 'that the threat level has been reduced, quite drastically, in fact, and we would not normally offer protection to anyone assessed at the new level.'

His heart had begun to pound but he tried to remain outwardly controlled. 'I see,' he said. 'So you'll be withdrawing the protection, then.'

'I just wanted to give you the opportunity,' Bob Sait said, 'of saying if that would be acceptable to you. It would be in line with what you've been arguing, would that be correct to say?'

'Yes,' he said, 'it would, and yes, it would be acceptable.'

'We'd like to give a party for you at the Yard as soon as it's convenient,' said Nick Cottage. 'To get as many of the lads as possible who have worked with you over the years. It's been one of our very longest prots and there's a lot of pride in what's been done. And a lot of appreciation of what you endured as well, a lot of the team have said they know they couldn't have stuck it out the way you did, so it would be good to have a chance to celebrate, if you're agreeable.'

'That would be lovely,' he said, the blood rising in his face.

'We'd like to ask some of your close friends too,' Nick said. 'The ones who have helped so much over the years.'

Then there was nothing more to say. 'So what happens now?' he asked. 'How do we go about this?' Bob and Nick stood up. 'It's been a privilege, Joe, excuse me, Salman,' Bob Sait said, and stuck out his hand. 'Good for you, mate,' said Nick. He shook their hands, and they turned, and left. That was it. More than thirteen years after the police walked into his life, they spun on their heels and walked out of it. The abruptness of it made him laugh out loud.

The Special Branch party did take place soon afterwards. One of the officers who attended it was Rab Connolly, who had completed the degree course in post-colonial literature he had begun during the prot. 'I've got something for you,' he whispered like a stage villain, and slipped a small metal object into his palm. 'What is it?' he asked Rab. 'It's the bullet,' Rab said, and so it was. The bullet that poor Mike Merrill had accidentally fired inside the Bishop's Avenue house while cleaning his gun. 'That was a close one,' Rab said. 'I thought you might like it as a souvenir.'

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He was standing in the doorway of the Halcyon Hotel watching the police Jaguars pull away. Then he remembered that he ought to go to see the estate agents in Westbourne Grove, sign the papers for the Colville Mews house, and take another look at the place. 'All right then,' he thought, 'here goes.' He walked out of the Halcyon Hotel on to Holland Park Avenue and stuck out an arm to hail a passing cab.